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THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Letter dated 15 June 1998 from the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Government of Israel is presently seeking to complete a new set of understandings with the Palestinian Authority, through the assistance of the United States of America, with the aim of putting the peace process back on track. Israel is hopeful that these understandings will provide a framework for achieving Palestinian compliance with commitments made at the time of the 1997 Hebron Protocol, which have not been kept to this day.

Israel's insistence on Palestinian compliance has chiefly focused on the area of security, for understandable reasons. Since the signing of the Oslo Agreements hundreds of Israelis have died from brutal terrorist attacks emanating from territory under the control of the Palestinian Authority. On 16 April 1998, the head of Israeli military intelligence, Major General Moshe Ya'alon, disclosed to the Hebrew daily Ma'ariv:

> "Sadly, I cannot say that at any point in time since it entered the territory, in May 1994, that the Palestinian Authority acted decisively and in a clear-cut way against the terrorist operational capability of Hamas, as well as of the Islamic Jihad and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine."

Terrorism does not occur in a vacuum; it is directly affected by what the Palestinian national leadership is stating on television, by what is being taught throughout its schools and by what is being preached in its mosques. Restoring security requires not only constant action by the Palestinian security services; it also requires creating an environment free from incitement to violence.

Unfortunately, in the past six weeks, the Palestinian Authority has escalated its widespread incitement to violence in all of its official media.

The Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Mr. Yasser Arafat, personally participated in this campaign, which included repeated televised scenes of intifada violence. This campaign recently culminated in massive demonstrations, organized by the Palestinian Authority, that were intended to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of what the PLO calls "al-Nakba", which is Arabic for "the catastrophe", referring to the creation of the State of Israel.

This is not the first time official Palestinian media have been used to incite violence against Israel. For example, on 13 February 1998, Palestinian television presented a programme for children, called "The Children's Club", in which pre-school Palestinians are taught to exalt suicide warriors. A young girl recites that when she enters Jerusalem, she "turns into a suicide warrior in battle-dress." She is applauded by her schoolmates and by her teacher, who cries out "bravo". Real peace requires that Governments educate for peace, rather then legitimizing hatred and violence.

Mr. Arafat himself appeared on Palestinian television on 19 January 1998, specifically praising Yahya Ayyash, the mastermind of the Hamas suicide bombings that killed hundreds of innocent Israelis in the heart of Israeli cities. Arafat describes him as "the example, the model and the goal" of the Palestinians. He moreover states that "our goal is to follow their path". Chairman Arafat goes on to place Ayyash in a pantheon of past Palestinian heroes. This is hardly a way to make peace by any international standard.

Given this sort of rhetoric it is not surprising that Chairman Arafat's security forces have failed to crack down specifically on the Hamas military capability - from illegal firearms to entire bomb factories. Hamas military operatives, even those involved in bomb attacks, have not been kept imprisoned. As General Ya'alon has noted:

> "Muhammad Def, who is responsible for the February-March 1996 attacks, is running free in the Gaza Strip ... Hamas personnel still have in their possession weapons and explosive materials and they are not being dealt with."

The most critical figure in the Palestinian security services, who has responsibility for combating Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, is Colonel Jabril Rajoub, head of the Palestinian Authority's preventive security agency in the West Bank. Rajoub told Al-Jazira television on 27 May 1998 that from his standpoint Hamas had a green light for resuming attacks on Israel:

> "We view Hamas as part of the national and Islamic liberation movement ... Outside of the 3 per cent [of the West Bank under complete Palestinian control, known as area A] they can do as they wish ... They can go to Jordan to carry out armed operations and they can also carry out such operations from Syria ... At the top of my list of priorities is the [Israeli] occupation and not Hamas ... We are not interested in arrests."

Clearly, according to Colonel Rajoub, the Palestinian Authority has no responsibility for preventing attacks on Israel from area B - the area of full Palestinian civilian control and shared Israeli-Palestinian security control. Rajoub repeated this point on 13 June 1998 to Radio Algiers:

"First of all, we have never prevented any Palestinian from carrying out the struggle against Israel ... During the past four years, we have never prevented anyone from fighting in the territories which are not under our control ... 97 per cent of the West Bank is still under occupation. I think that they can carry out resistance from there. We have never prevented anyone nor shall we prevent anyone from doing so ..."

These distinctions are critical since the process of further redeployment, being discussed at present, involves converting large tracts of the West Bank from area C (full Israeli security control) to area B status, which, according to Rajoub, can be used for attacks on Israel.

This is simply unacceptable. For the people of Israel, these quotations raise hard questions. Is it the intention of Mr. Arafat's PLO leadership to continue to wage armed struggle against Israel, as long as this war is carried out by proxy (i.e., Hamas)? Is an entirely new generation of children already being trained to perpetuate this conflict by being taught to become suicide bombers? On 18 April 1998, Chairman Arafat appeared on Egyptian Orbit TV and compared the Oslo Agreements to the Khudaibiya agreement, a temporary truce that lasted only two years between the Prophet Mohammed and the Arabian tribe of Koreish.

Arafat called Oslo, in the same interview, an "inferior peace", and then stated that the lessons of Khudaibiya and those of Salah-a-Din must be learned today. He preceded this by making reference to the decisions of the 1974 Palestinian National Council meeting in Cairo, which adopted a 10-point programme calling for the creation of a Palestinian National Authority by the PLO on any land ceded by Israel. Subsequently, the PLO plan proposed the overthrow of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and finally the mobilization of a general Arab State assault on Israel. References to Khudaibiya and the "phased plan" only reinforce Israeli suspicions about Palestinian intentions.

For Israel, the peace process is not a temporary truce, but an irreversible commitment to reach a permanent reconciliation with the Palestinian people and the Arab world. Israel is determined to make this peace process work; it is frustrated with the difficulties it encounters in nailing down clear commitments from the Palestinian Authority to achieve a secure peace. No nation can pursue peace and simply ignore this sort of incitement. No nation can make unilateral concessions that leave its people more insecure. If the Palestinian commitment to comply with the Oslo Agreements is established in both word and deed, then the peace process can swiftly move forward. Israel is hopeful that security can be restored and incitement terminated, so that both Israelis and Palestinians can reach the peace that they both so deserve and need.

I should be grateful if you would have the text of the present letter circulated as a document of the fifty-second session of the General Assembly under agenda item 37.

(Signed) Ambassador Dore GOLD
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Israel to the United Nations